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THE ALDINE.

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ZEKLE'S COURTIN'.

THE Literature of no European people is so rich in love poetry as that of the English. Of course the poets of all countries have written of love. It is the chief stock in trade of all young singers, and it enters largely into the compositions of many old ones. The early poets of France and Italy were nothing if not lovers. That they were ever read is inconceivable, they are so prolix and so tedious; but as the interminable romances of Mademoiselle Scudery are known to have been read once, it is not impossible that the old Trouvères and Troubadours may have found confiding victims who finally floundered through their rhymes. We can read the early English poets, although it requires some effort to do so after we leave Chaucer. Beginning with a little of Wyatt and Surrey, we are prepared to enjoy the Elizabethan writers. There are charming things in Breton, as well as in Greene and Marlow. Ben Jonson is better than either, and Carew at his best is delicious. Herrick's amatory verse is so beautiful that it almost condones his grossness in other themes. The same may be said of the little lyrics of Lovelace, Suckling, and Sedley, even of some of the songs of Aphra Behn, whose work in general was a disgrace to her sex. The defect of the love poetry of this period, and, indeed, of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in general, is a lack of naturalness and simplicity. It does not impress us as being genuine; it seems to be got up for effect; it was written because it was the fashion then.

We strike nature, however, in the collections of old ballads and songs which were published from time to time in the last century; in Allan Ramsay's collection of *Scottish Songs*, in Percy's *Reliques of Old English Poetry*, and in the *Specimens* of Ellis, and others. It is genuine emotion which we feel in reading "Auld Robin Gray."

We have glimpses of real feeling in the pretty poem in praise of Winifreda, the author of which is unknown, although it is sometimes attributed to Gilbert Cooper. How charming this is:

"And when with envy Time, transported,
Shall think to rob us of our joys,
You'll in your girls again be courted,
And I'll go wooing in my boys."

We are in a world where lovers reign supreme when we open Burns, who sang of love like a man inspired. It was the passion of his life; he sounded all its depths, and touched it at all extremes. No one else—not even Shakspeare—ever said so much in so few words, as Burns, in this stanza:

"Had we never loved sae kindly,
Had we never loved sae blindly,
Never met, or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted!"

It is the intensity of passion which is speaking here, as in "Highland Mary," and "To Mary in Heaven." We cannot have much poetry like this—there is not blood enough in the heart of one man to enable him to write much of it; but we can have hundreds of lighter songs, and we can find them in Burns. We find them in "O my luve's like a red, red rose," and in "Tam Glen." To take the lightest that we can find, "Duncan Gray"—was there ever such a tragicomical wooing as his?

"Duncan Gray cam here to woo,
Ha, ha, the wooing o't!
On blythe Yule-night when we were fou,
Ha, ha, the wooing o't!
Maggie coost her head fu' high,
Looked askant and unco skeigh,
Gart poor Duncan stand abeigh;
Ha, ha, the wooing o't!"

"Duncan fleeced, and Duncan prayed;
Ha, ha, the wooing o't!
Meg was deaf as Ailsa Craig,
Ha, ha, the wooing o't!
Duncan sighed baith out and in,
Got his c'en baith blurt and blin',
Spak o' lowpin' owre a linn;
Ha, ha, the wooing o't!"

The wooing of Duncan Gray was the master-piece of its kind in English Literature, until Professor Lowell

wrote "Zekle's Courtin'." We shall not compare the two poems, for comparisons are odorous, as Mrs. Malaprop taught us long ago, nor shall we compare Professor Lowell's poem with anything else that he has written. We will only say, for ourselves, that we would rather have written it than any single poem of any American poet, with the exception of Mr. Bryant's "Thanatopsis." There is nothing like it in American or English Literature. It is unique, and it is perfect. Or rather was perfect, as it originally stood; for we confess we do not like the second version as well as the first one. We acknowledge the excellence of the longer poem; still it is not our first love. It possesses a merit which does not usually accompany the kind of poetry of which it is the most brilliant example in this country, and which depends for its effect upon the Characteristic—the rare merit of overdoing nothing. Any poet besides Professor Lowell would have overdone something—one, the situation, perhaps, another the dialect. There would have been some discord in it—something not in keeping with the general effect. As it is, however, it is perfect, being as characteristic of a certain phase of life in New England, as the poems of Burns are of a certain phase of life in Scotland. Whether this life is precisely what it was forty or fifty years ago, we are not prepared to say, but, we fancy, it is substantially the same. The plain folk who made it belonged to a stock that is slow to change its ways. What they were has been described in verse better than we can describe it in prose, and, with the reader's permission, we will copy two or three stanzas for his benefit:

"The farmer tilled the ground
His father tilled before;
If it supplied his wants,
He asked for nothing more.
Thankful for what he had,
On Sunday, in his pew,
He sang a hymn of praise,
When this old flag was new.

"He wore a homespun suit
His wife and daughters made;
'T was dyed with butternuts,
And, likely, old and frayed;
They dressed in calicoes,
And looked right pretty, too;
Women, not clothes, were loved
When this old flag was new.

"Men married women then,
Who kept their healthful bloom,
By working at the churn,
And at the wheel and loom;
Who could their stockings knit,
And darn, and bake, and brew;
A housewife in each house,
When this old flag was new.

"And women married men
Who did not shrink from toil,
But wrung with sweat their bread
From out the stubborn soil;
Whose axes felled the wood,
And when so late it grew
Did straightway build their homes
When this old flag was new."

As we have declared our preference for the earlier version of Professor Lowell's poem, the readers of *THE ALDINE* may like to see it. We copy it from memory, partly helped by the rough draft of it which is in our possession:

ZEKLE'S COURTIN'.

Zekle crep' up quite unbeknown,
An' peeked in thro' the winder,
An' there sot Huldy all alone,
'Ith no one nigh to hender.

The wa'nut logs shot sparkles out
Towards the pootiest, bless her,
An' leetle flames danced all about
The chiny on the dresser.

Agin the chimby crook-necks hung,
An' in amongst 'em rusted
The ole queen's-arm thet gran'ther Young
Fetched back from Concord busted.

The very room, 'coz she was in,
Seemed warm from floor to ceilin',
An' she looked full as rosy agin
Ez the apples she was peelin'.

She heerd a foot, and knowed it tu,
A-raspin' on the scraper,—
All ways to once her feelin's flew
Like sparks ov burnt-up paper.

He kin' o' l'itered on the mat,
Some doubtfle o' the sekle,
His heart kep' goin' pity-pat,
But hern went pity Zekle.

An' yit she gin her cheer a jerk
Ez though she wished him furdur,
An' on her apples kep' to work,
Parin' away like murder.

"You want to see my Pa, I s'pose?"
"Wal . . . No . . . I came designin'—"
"To see my Ma? She's sprinklin' clo'es
Agin to-morrer's i'nin."

He stood a spell on one foot fust,
Then stood a spell on t' other,
An' on which one he felt the wust
He could n't ha' told ye nuther.

Says he, "I'd better call agin;"
Says she, "Think likely, Mister."
That last word pricked him like a pin,
An' . . . wal, he up and kist her.

When Ma bimeby upon 'em slips,
Huldy sot pale ez ashes,
All kin' o' smily roun' the lips
An' teary roun' the lashes.

Then her color came back like the tide
Down to the Bay o' Fundy,
An' all I know is they was cried
In meetin' come nex' Sunday.

INSIDE THE DOOR.

YES! the small brick house on the corner did need something more than the bay window which occupied nearly the whole width of the building; something more than the luxuriant wisteria which wreathed and draped the window; something more than the pretty iron balcony, and the exceeding neatness suggested of the interior, to make it the *home* it seemed to be to foot passengers, who often found themselves lingering as they approached the place, enchanted by the scent of mignonette that flourished in the grass plot, and by the lovely tints of the wandering jew, which seemed to diffuse themselves, like a pleasant atmosphere, around the enclosure.

But did the organist of St. James' Church, who lived three blocks beyond, suspect it? How could she? Hurrying past the house, on her way to music lesson and rehearsal, she often found herself slackening her pace, and taking in the attractive scene, and going onward felt refreshed by what she had perceived, and still more perhaps by what had been suggested; for give the woman a single thread of beauty, and in her hand it was equivalent to a clue to all desired delight. The only difficulty with her was, that she never found time to follow its leading far—else, times over, she had discovered heaven upon earth.

The outside of the house suggested to her no end of interior beauty. Sometimes, in passing, she heard a violin, sometimes a piano, sometimes a voice that, as she declared, electrified her—it was so genuinely sweet, rich and so unworn. So that, turning the corner wearied and rasped to impatience, the mere sight of that small abode was a refreshment. She hailed it as a pilgrim hails the green spot in the desert—and, alas! not seldom, the mirage also.

Within the little Birds' Nest, as the organist, with more poetical feeling than originality, was wont privately to designate the house (she had some secret sources of comfort, this hard-worked creature, which were not for every ear), within this little Birds' Nest, on a sultry June evening, behind the bay window, and the wisteria and honeysuckle, wandering jew and mignonette, stood a desperate-hearted woman, with as playful and composed a countenance as some of the martyrs, let us believe, have shown ere now on their way to the fagot.

This woman is thirty-five, perhaps, but she looks older. Find her up-stairs any hour of the long day, when she is alone with her sad thoughts for company, and you shall see a woman who is looking towards the future with distracting fears, but who, in the effort to withstand their drift and pressure, is foretasting all the bitterness of disappointed age. She has now bright ribbons in her hair and around her neck, and, by gas-light, she looks almost happy, almost young. At the piano sits her husband. And now the story is nearly all told.

It is Saturday evening, and what is she doing if not endeavoring, by every kindly artifice, to keep at home the half-drunken man who sits on the piano-stool! So she has persuaded him to the piano, and he has been singing, and they have talked now for at least an hour about their favorite compositions, and discussed, as critics, one work and another, and in their judgments they have not agreed with each other so constantly as to make the conversation tiresome. But the talk is proving too much of a good thing to the husband; evidently he is wearied of it. He has

allowed himself to be persuaded into playing and singing a good deal, and into talking much, but during the last half-hour he has betrayed increasing restlessness, and begins to speak at last with undisguised impatience. An indifferent listener might almost say, in the blunt speech of indifference, that he was getting cross and quarrelsome, and awfully disagreeable. Is he becoming suspicious of his poor Louisa? Does she design to keep him at home when she knows very well about his Saturday-night engagement to go to the Architects' Club? Poor architect, whose own foundations seem to be tumbling in, he must be faithful to his club, though to everything else unfaithful!

He even begins to suspect the pleasure which he knows his wife takes, and always has taken, in his music. Does he need to be reminded of the many times she has said to him, that a single melody from him is worth more to her than the loud and splendid performance of a well-directed orchestra—feeding a more subtle need, and sustaining a diviner life? He talks in a way that would make one suspect his intention to attack her soon on the ground of that one delight she has found in him, which has remained unquestionable.

His wife understands these symptoms well enough to know that in thirty minutes, at furthest, he will somehow have passed beyond her reach. Is it not a sad, sad conviction to be pressing on the heart of the woman? You know now why I shook my head as I looked at the pretty bay window and the outside green and perfume. Anybody who knew the old Pharaohs intimately, in the days of their glory, would grieve, I am sure, if coursing over the sands of modern Egypt, on a swift Arabian charger, he came across the great Pyramid stripped so bare of its external beauty. To think of the hopes with which that young woman set up housekeeping in that little brick house, and the track by which those hopes were retiring, one by one! What is to be wondered at, and admired, is the way the good girl stands her ground and tries to be agreeable, and to out-rival the gin barrel. 'Tis not her fault that her husband is where he is—without work—drinking hard—at intervals all too brief, rallying again—hating himself, and sliding down to ruin. No, believe me, she has not to arraign and convict herself for all this misery. All at once, as he is rising from the piano-stool, a ring at the door bell. Who comes? They have so little company out there it is really a question. Rogers hopes it is Dixon. Dixon and he are hale fellows well met, about once a week all night in the club room! They listen; is it Dixon? She fearing, he hoping that it is. But, if Dixon were out there, both would feel it beyond fear or hope, he comes so valiantly, when he does come. No, it is not Dixon's voice, but a woman's. Husband and wife look at each other. He means to escape while his wife receives her company. She sees his purpose, and knows that he will accomplish it. "Oh Lord!" she says to herself. Will she be thinking sadly, an hour from now, when she sits alone, that but for this untimely call all would have gone smoothly, Pierce, perhaps, safely asleep by this time?

"I beg your pardon for intruding," says a strange voice—and how is Rogers to get out of the room? Here is a woman six feet in height, at least, who looks as if she might, if she took the fancy to do it, go off, carrying husband on one shoulder and wife on the other. "I beg your pardon," she says again, "but I have come here in the greatest distress." Pierce Rogers, hearing himself actually called upon as the champion of weakness, begins to look grave, and to feel himself equal to the occasion.

"Pray be seated," says the lady of the house; and what can the gentleman of the house do but sit down with the careful deliberation of a man whom nobody is to suspect of inability to rise, or sit, or go where and when he pleases. The stranger, though not a pretty woman—and, in fact, she is quite the reverse—has, nevertheless, made an impression, and Pierce is a gentleman, if not perfectly sober.

"I have been waiting outside," she says, taking the seat indicated by his action as well as his glance, "hoping to hear the voice which I have heard so often in passing this house. I have waited ten minutes, I suppose, till I was afraid I might be arrested as a vagrant, and, as I was not rewarded for my patience, I determined to put on a bold face and ring the door bell—I don't exactly know how to go on. May I tell you what I want, as if you were a couple of friends?"

"Do, I beg," said Louisa, and her husband politely seconded the entreaty, though not under the devout

conviction his wife felt that here was a godsend. If that woman would only say something interesting she might stay and talk for hours in welcome; indeed the longer the story the better. Would that she might even prove to have the gift of Scheherazade!

"I am the organist of St. James' Church," the stranger began, "besides, a music teacher."

"Indeed!" said Pierce, but he stopped there, though it was evident to his wife that he was interested, and she smiled—oh how interestedly she did smile upon the organist, who, like an angel, had condescended to visit her abode.

"I have had a hard time with the church music," continued this angel. "Everybody who knows anything about the church knows that, so I am not telling tales out of school. The music committee have, finally, put the choir entirely into my hands, and I shall have good music from it some time. But I have been obliged to take an extraordinary step. I have dismissed the tenor singer this evening, and everything at present looks like chaos—to the choir, not to me."

"The tenor of St. James' Choir is the best in the city," said Pierce, almost sobered by his surprise.

"I know that."

"He has sung there ten years to my certain knowledge."

"Yes, and made everybody believe that he was even more necessary to the welfare of the church than the minister who serves, and the gospel which is preached there. All things must come to an end, and I have dismissed him."

"I heard he had a salary equal to the rector's," said Pierce.

"I don't doubt it. He is like an institution, always ready to be endowed. No end to his receptivity. Well, sir, will you take his place?"

"I, madame?"

If his brain did not reel at this sudden, most unlooked-for opening of a way of escape from debt and disaster, his wife's did. But she said, quickly, before he had time to rally from his amazement:

"My husband is surprised that you should suppose him capable of filling Mr. Armitage's place, and no wonder. I am, myself. And I think better of his voice than he does."

"Fiddle-stick!" said he. "Armitage does very well, but I know him; his range is limited."

"Exactly," said the organist. "It is. I don't dispute his voice, his execution, and all that, but his impertinence and presumption I will endure no longer. I have said that if we must have congregational singing to-morrow, instead of a quartette, congregational singing we will have. But may I not hope, sir, that you will come over and help me?"

Pierce Rogers still looked bewildered, and Louisa doubtful. He could not conceal his embarrassment and perplexity. Here was an opportunity, and the painful consciousness that he had not steadiness of nerve and potency of will to make the most of it. To be a first-rate singer in the choir of a first-rate church might not be an ambition worthy of the man who, five or six years ago, was thinking of himself as an architect who, possibly, might some day be regarded as the peer of Sir Christopher Wren, in the judgment of the world; but then had he not from that height of aspiring hope descended to attune himself to harmony with Tom, Dick, and Harry, in dark places underground?

And then how often had Armitage snubbed him, in old times, when they sang in the same glee club; and in later years by entirely ceasing to recognize him! If—oh if he could only feel so certain of himself as to dare close with the woman's proposal at once!

"Do come," she urged, perceiving his hesitation. "Come to-morrow! I am sure you will not need a rehearsal even. But here, I have the music with me which we are to sing. Let me try your piano. I would so like to have a success right away, and show Mr. Armitage the truth for once. Why it would be little short of a miracle! Don't you think I may?"

She addressed Louisa now. Had she comprehended the situation of affairs in that little household?

"Pray, Pierce," said Louisa, "try the music for the fun of the thing. Did you ever hear of anything so odd?" She spoke in an undertone to her husband. She had enough confidence in him, then, to wish him to make the trial. If she had looked at him dismayed, or regretful, he would never have made the effort, but now he got up and walked unsteadily to the piano. In that moment the two women ex-

changed a glance, and so they understood each other. "It seems ridiculous that I should attempt church music," said Pierce, sitting down at the instrument with an air that brought tears into his wife's eyes.

"No, I do assure you," said the delighted organist. "You remember how easy it used to be about five hundred years ago, and how pleasant it was," said Louisa, her voice full of reminiscence.

"That was very different," he answered. "A small country congregation is not expected to require what a fashionable church must have, whether or no. Now, I must say, madame, I wonder that you dismissed Armitage." He leaned against the piano as he spoke, and looked as if prepared to enter into a long argument.

"I don't," she replied with spirit. "Just you help me to prove what I know is the fact, that there are voices, not many, perhaps, but one or two, at least, quite equal to his in quality and cultivation."

How well that was said, while she had her back to him, and was drawing off her gloves and arranging her music, and, apparently, as far from an intent to flatter him into her service as the sun is from such intent when he makes the wayside flower blush into its best beauty.

Well now—was the battle fought, the victory won, because next day one-half of the worshipers in St. James' did not know whence came the "superb tenor" who sang instead of Mr. Armitage? Because Pierce Rogers stayed home that Saturday night and became sober, and really seemed to forget his engagement at the club?

Who will believe it that knows anything of human flesh and blood? Monday night, Louisa might as well have undertaken to control Niagara as Pierce; and for three days this "superb tenor" was speechless as the dead. Nevertheless he has never, since his first Sunday, lost a service in the church where first class music is a foremost necessity; and I am certain that, as my friend the organist never did a braver thing than to dismiss Mr. Armitage, so also she never performed an act for which all Christians worshipping in St. James' have so great cause to rejoice, as that which led a falling man in among them to exalt "the Lord's song" in what was, to him, "a strange land," indeed.

If you had not this woman to help you, Louisa, I would cry aloud to Christendom for prayers in your behalf. But I remember that "he prayeth best who loveth best;" so, ten to one, you and the organist will give back to the world yet, if not a Sir Christopher Wren, a man who has repaired his own foundations, and gone on with the erection of at least one notable structure.

— Caroline Cheesbro'.

NECESSITY OF BELIEVING SOMETHING.—On the earth lay faded yellow rose-leaves, and skeletons of nosegays, in which there was more of sticks and threads than of flowers; it seemed to me as if I saw the summer in which they had grown and blossomed, lying withered at my feet; and the evening joys which Sunday shed among the villagers; and many a youthful, high-beating bosom, from which (perhaps more brightly blooming than they) they had dropped faded; and gladly would I have put the summer, and its withered joys, by their dead stalks into water and revived them; and I looked at the tall sexton, to whom the thing was nothing but a vexation, as he took the broom and swept them away among the dry dust. As we came down, and I trod, like death, over the breast of many a strong, mail-clad knight, and his gently-supplicating lady-wife, I thought deeply, but cheerfully, of the old bygone Catholic times, whose rostrum and whose theatre this place had been. A Catholic church, as it now is, presses the near image of the gloomy, ponderous middle ages too heavily on my heart; but if its service has ceased, then the dim, shadowy picture pleases me; and I figure to myself indulgently, how many a fevered bosom here caught fresh air; how many a breathing sigh, how many a sanctifying prayer, were uttered here; and how the poor people, sunk in the deepest shaft of monkery, beheld, not indeed the quickening sun of our living day, but, like other miners, some star of the second day—even that is something. And I would rather dwell in the dim fog of superstition, than in air rarefied to nothing by the air-pump of unbelief, in which the panting beast expires, vainly and convulsively gasping for breath.

— Jean Paul.